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Building Healthy Relationships in A Multi-ethnic Congregation With No Ethnic Majority: A Case Study of Sunrise Church

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**BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS IN A MULTI-ETHNIC
CONGREGATION WITH NO ETHNIC MAJORITY:
A CASE STUDY OF SUNRISE CHURCH**

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Arturo Lucero and Robert R. Weaver

abstract

Friendship development is the key to the integration of members in multiethnic churches. Research has shown that in small congregations with an ethnic majority, those belonging to minorities experience high personal costs, thereby increasing the rate of turnover of fringe minorities.¹ Our study focuses on the friendship development between ethnic groups in a mega-church with no ethnic majority. The conclusion is that the same social dynamics that produce homogeneity in non-religious volunteer organizations occur in a local church with no ethnic majority. In other words, people demonstrated a tendency of being with their own kind.

introduction

Do the cross-racial friendships of members increase as a result of attending a multiethnic church with no ethnic majority? Or does heterogeneity relationally segregate members of multiethnic churches with no ethnic majority?

¹ Brad Christerson and Michael Emerson, "The Costs of Diversity in Religious Organizations: An In-depth Case Study," *Sociology of Religion* 64 no. 2 (2003): 163–181.

get along.

Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace (Colossians 3:11–15, NIV).

Therefore, is the lack of cross-racial friendships an indication of a lack of biblical peace and unity among members of a multiethnic church? Or is it possible to adhere to biblical admonitions as a relationally semi-segregated multiethnic congregation?

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research on friendships

Research has shown that minority group members struggle to feel a sense of belonging in multiethnic churches with a majority group. Minority group members tend to have more friends outside of the church than majority group members, and turnover rates are higher for minority group members.² Do these findings hold true for a church with no ethnic majority? How do the findings for Sunrise Church, which is beyond that transitional period, compare with other churches that are in the midst of transitioning to multiethnic congregations? To answer these questions, we interviewed members from three eras of Sunrise Church—the Pre-Pankratz Era (1957–1988), the Transition Era (1989–1996), and the Growth Era (1997–2010).

The four guiding hypotheses are:

- Hypothesis #1: Members of Sunrise Church will have a greater percentage of cross-racial friends because the church has no ethnic majority group.
- Hypothesis #2: Members who have been at Sunrise Church longer will have more cross-racial friends than those who have attended over a shorter time period.
- Hypothesis #3: The multiple opportunities for social interaction at Sunrise Church facilitate the development of cross-racial friends.
- Hypothesis #4: Multiethnic interactions help individuals deal with their biases and prejudices.

² Brad Christerson, Korie L. Edwards, and Michael O. Emerson, *Against All Odds: The Struggle for Racial Integration in Religious Organizations* (New York: New York University Press, 2005) page

following attraction theories:

- *The Homophily Principle*: This is the tendency to form friendships with similar others. It is best described by the maxim, “Birds of a feather flock together.” The comprehensive work on the Homophily Principle by McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook states that “people’s personal networks are homogeneous.”³ Homophily in race and ethnicity creates the strongest divides in our personal environments, with age, religion, education, occupation, and gender following in roughly that order.⁴
- *The Propinquity Effect*: This is the tendency for people to form friendships or romantic relationships with those whom they encounter often. This principle states that the more we interact with others, the more likely we are to like them and become friends with those individuals.⁵
- *Similarity*: This theory states that individuals with similar backgrounds, attitudes, values, beliefs, etc. become friends.⁶
- *Reciprocity*: This theory states that we like those who like us.⁷

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The impact of these friendship theories within a multiracial setting is that the Homophily Principle continues to promote racially segregated friendships, since birds of a feather like to stick together, while the Propinquity Effect increases the potential for cross-racial friendships. When these principles are applied to a multiethnic church setting, they coexist, and the Homophily Principle, in conjunction with the web principle of evangelism (sphere of influence), increases the numbers of each of the ethnic groups as they each reach out to their respective families and friends. The Propinquity Effect, through the programming of the church, predicts the regular and ongoing exposure of individuals from different ethnicities to worship, learn, serve, play, and grow together. Church programming also provides the environment for Similarity to allow racially and ethnically diverse individuals to bond based upon similar backgrounds, education, work, ministry involvement, and special interests. It also promotes Reciprocity for people to experience their acceptance by those different from them, and thereby opens them up to build relationships with those not like them.

³ Miller McPherson, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and James M. Cook, “Birds of A Feather: Homophily in Social Networks,” *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27 (2001): 415.

⁴ Ibid., 420.

⁵ L. Quillian and M. E. Campbell, “Beyond black and white: The present and future of multiracial friendship segregation,” *American Sociological Review*, 68 (2003): 540–566.

⁶ T. M. Newcomb, “Stabilities Underlying Changes in Interpersonal Attraction,” *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 66 no. 4 (1963): 376–386.

⁷ R. C. Curtis and K. Miller, “Believing Another Likes or Dislikes You: Behaviours Making the Beliefs Come True,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 51 no. 2 (1986): 284–290.

friendship development is available through the programming at Sunrise Church, the question is, “How many new friends can any one individual develop? According to sociological research individuals are limited to a 150 stable relationships in their social network.”⁸ Only a few individuals, known as the social core, are friends with whom they are willing to discuss important matters.⁹

Cameron Marlow found that the average number of friends in a Facebook network is 120, consistent with the Dunbar Number of 150. Also the average man—with 120 friends—responds to the postings of 7 friends.¹⁰

An average woman responds to 10. Regarding e-mails or chats, the average man interacts with 4 people and the average woman with 6. Among Facebook users with 500 friends, what increases is not the social core but the number of casual contacts.¹¹

This is consistent with Marsden's ideas about core networks. Research based on the General Social Survey, which measures the number of social core individuals with whom Americans discuss important matters, dropped from 2.94 persons in 1985 to 2.08 in 2004. That is a loss of one social core confidant over a period of 14 years.¹²

McPherson stated the value of social interaction in the following:

Social scientists know that contacts with other people are important in both instrumental and socio-emotional domains. The closer and stronger our tie with someone, the broader the scope of their support for us and the greater the likelihood that they will provide major help in a crisis. These are important people in our lives. They influence us directly through their interactions with us and indirectly by shaping the kinds of people we become.¹³

Research has found that not all friendships are equal. “People perceive (a) relationships with best friends as more intense and intimate than other friendships and (b) other friendships as more intense and intimate than acquaintanceships.”¹⁴ We will refer to these levels of friendships as *best*, *better* (other friends), and *good* (acquaintances). This is significant since the number of social core confidants, best

⁸ "Primate on Facebook," *The Economist*, February 26, 2009.
http://www.economist.com/science/displaystory.cfm?story_id=13176775 (accessed August 9, 2010).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Cameron Marlow, quoted in "Primate on Facebook," *The Economist*, February 26, 2009. http://www.economist.com/science/displaystory.cfm?story_id=13176775 (accessed August 9, 2010).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² P.V. Marsden quoted in Miller McPherson, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and Matthew E. Brashears, "Social Isolation in America: Changes in Core Discussion Networks Over Two Decades," *American Sociological Review*, 71 no. 3 (2006), abstract.

¹³ Ibid., 354.

¹⁴ Francis T. McAndrew and Anna Rybak, "How Do We Decide Whom Our Friends Are? Defining Levels of Friendship in Poland and the United States," *Journal of Social Psychology*, 146 no. 2 (2006), 147.

have, which for the sake of this project is defined as individuals with whom you are
willing to discuss important matters.

historical setting for the three eras of study

Pre-Pankratz Era. The foundation for transitioning Rialto Community Baptist Church (RCBC) to Sunrise Church was in process years before Pastor Jay's arrival. It began with the demographical change in the community, followed by the early adaptors, those minority families who were willing to accommodate themselves to the traditional Caucasian Baptist liturgy and church culture of RCBC. That accommodation was facilitated by the fact that these early adaptors were accustomed to living and working in the Caucasian culture of the day. According to one of the church leaders of that period,

It was a certain Hispanic upper middle class and middle class that fit in [at RCBC]. The same was true with African-Americans. These people were already blended into our society through their work and community. The ones that stayed the longest were the ones that were already assimilated and felt comfortable in our church.¹⁵

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Another leader stated, "I would say that they were upper middle class. They had some college education and held professional or supervisory jobs."¹⁶

The Transition Era. Pastor Jay Pankratz came to Sunrise Church in 1989. He recalled the following about his first six years of ministry at Sunrise Church.

My first year, we drafted a church vision statement which said, "We will seek to reach all ethnic groups without distinction or separation." In the next few years, we were surprised to see some from other ethnicities coming and joining our church. As the numbers from other ethnicities increased and some moved into leadership, the criticism increased from all sides. I had people calling, "Hey you're letting the Blacks take over the church. I'm out of here." Then there were the African-Americans and Hispanics that were saying, "Hey, you're going too slow; you're letting these traditional people (Caucasians) slow this thing down." I was getting hammered intensely from both sides, and that went on for six years. It still happens, but not as much anymore. Those were difficult times. There was a lot of criticism. After six years of difficult struggles and limited success, I nearly left the church.¹⁷

¹⁵ Interview, Caucasian male from the Pre-Pankratz Era.

¹⁶ Interview, Caucasian male from the Pre-Pankratz Era.

¹⁷ Jay Pankratz, Turnaround Church Conference, Rialto, CA, April 11–13, 2002.

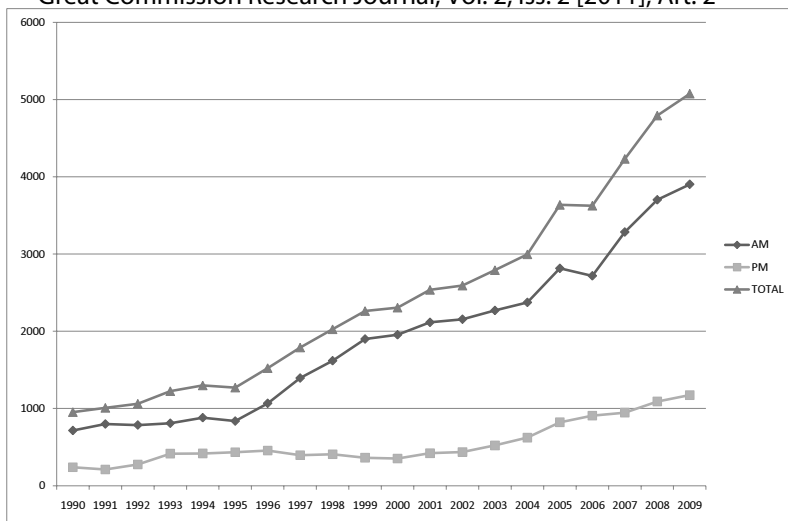


Figure 1

Sunrise Church Annual Average Attendance 1990–2009

During this era a number of Caucasians left the church, and the number of African- Americans and Hispanics increased. Once the last of those who opposed Pastor Jay's vision to reach all people left, the floodgates broke open.

The Growth Era. The numerical growth shot up dramatically in the seventh year and continues to increase to this day (see Figure 1). Some intentional factors that contributed to the growth and diversity of Sunrise Church were (numbers do not indicate priority or sequence) as follows:

1. The election of minority leadership (deacons, deaconesses, and elders).
2. The hiring of ethnics to the pastoral and support staff.
3. The placement of multiethnic ministry members in high profile ministries—parking attendants, ushers, greeters, praise team, and children's workers.
4. The implementation of a spiritual growth process in which all members are strongly encouraged to complete.
5. The evolving shift of worship styles from traditional, to contemporary, to an upbeat multiethnic worship service.
6. Bi-annual mailers (75,000 per mailing) sent to the community with photos that reflect the diversity of the church.
7. The launching of a Spanish-speaking service that meets simultaneously with English speaking services.
8. The use of multiple examples of ethnic national leaders, Christian leaders, and individuals in the sermon illustrations.

9. The granting of permission for members' expressions of worship in a manner that reflects their worship heritage.
10. The use of personal testimonies of individuals of all ethnicities for sermon illustrations.
11. Outreach events geared to engage the members of the church by praying for and inviting their neighbors, families, and friends to special events and worship services.
12. The production of outreach tools (sized like business cards and called invite cards), used to invite others to church events and services.

methodology

This research is purposive in nature using the membership of Sunrise Church in Rialto, California—an evangelical, multiethnic, multigenerational congregation with an average weekly attendance of 5,000 and no ethnic majority in its membership, leadership, or staff—for the case study.

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interview participants sample

The sample of interview participants was a purposive selection based on (1) their arrival during one of the three eras, (2) ethnicity, (3) gender, (4) marital status, (5) age, and (6) church membership. Participants represented the three major ethnic groups in the church (African-American, Caucasian, and Hispanic).

Participants represented equal numbers of men and women from the three eras of Sunrise Church history. A total of thirty-six individuals were anticipated for interviews, twelve from each of the three major ethnic groups, as well as two (a male and a female) from each of the six adult age categories in the Sunrise Church annual census. Due to the lack of Hispanics available for interview from the era before Dr. Pankratz's arrival to Sunrise Church, only one male from that era participated in the study, reducing the number of individuals interviewed to $n = 33$ (see Table 1, Ethnic Diversity of Sunrise Church Adults).

instrument

An interview questionnaire (Appendix A) for semi-structured interviews was developed by Art Lucero with the advice of Pastor Jay Pankratz, Brad Christerson, and Robert Weaver. Some of the questions had been previously used by Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson for their research for *Against All Odds: The Struggle for Racial Integration in Religious Organizations*.¹⁸ This was especially

¹⁸ Brad Christerson, Korie L. Edwards, and Michael O. Emerson, *Against All Odds: The Struggle for Racial Integration in Religious Organizations* (New York: New York University Press) 2005.

Ethnic Diversity of Sunrise Church Adults

<i>Group</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>African- American</i>	<i>Caucasian</i>	<i>Multi- racial</i>	<i>Asian/ Pacific Islander</i>	<i>American Indian</i>
Interviewees	33	21.2%	36.4%	30.3%	6.1%	6.1%	0.0%
Sunrise Church ^a	1893	43.8%	27.4%	27.2%	4.9%	4.1%	1.5%
Difference		-22.6%	9.0%	3.1%	1.2%	2.0%	-1.5%

Note. Sunrise Church data is from the annual Sunrise Church "Worship Service Survey" (Pankratz & Hurtado, 2009).

^a The total of the percentages equals 108.9% because the multi-racial respondents selected two or more ethnicities.

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appropriate, since our research is intended to compare some of their findings among multi-ethnic churches with a majority group, to Sunrise Church, a multi-ethnic congregation with no majority group.

data collection

Three interviewers, one of each ethnicity, were used to increase the integrity of responses. The audio-taped and transcribed interviews were conducted at Sunrise Church. Quantitative material was entered on an Excel spreadsheet.

data analysis

The questionnaire solicited both quantitative and qualitative data. Both were analyzed separately, and the findings were merged in the findings and conclusions.

Quantitative analysis. PASW[®] Statistics Grad Pack 18 was utilized to analyze the quantitative data. Most analyses involved group comparisons based on descriptive statistics.

Some interview sample data was excluded from some comparisons. Two Asian and two mixed ethnic interview participants were excluded from comparisons involving the three main ethnic groups. Additionally, some interview participants selected couples among their six choices of friends (26 of 198 possible choices). These data were excluded from analyses of interviewee-best friend matches for sex and ethnicity.

Qualitative analysis. A grounded theory approach was used for the analysis of the transcripts. No theoretical presuppositions were used. The data was allowed to dictate what is happening in the sample. The qualitative work by Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson was used to help us understand the findings.

This research seeks to mirror the friendship network research conducted by Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson.¹⁹ Respondents were asked to give the names and ethnicities of their three closest friends within the church, in rank order, as well as the names and ethnicities of their three closest friends outside of the church, in rank order. Respondents were asked whether they were closer to the number one friend within the church or to the number one friend outside of the church. The respondents were then asked to do the same comparison for the number two friends, inside and outside of the church, and the number three friends. Finally, respondents were asked to identify the most common characteristics of their three top friends, in the church and outside the church, in order from one to five (age, education, ethnicity, gender, occupation, and other).

hypothesis #1: members of multiethnic churches with no ethnic majority group will have more cross-racial friends.

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This hypothesis was not supported by the findings. In fact, among our sample, there was a tendency for individuals to have friends of the same ethnicity as opposed to those of different ethnicities. This pattern was the same for friends in the church as it was for those outside of the church (Table 2 Best Friends Ethnicity by Church Era, Table 3 Top Three Best Friends Ethnicity by Church Era). Joining a multiethnic church with no ethnic majority did not necessarily increase people's friendships with different ethnicities. Caucasians had fewer cross-racial friends

¹⁹ Ibid.

Table 2
Best Friends Ethnicity by Church Era

<i>Best Friends by Ethnicity</i>	<i>Same Ethnicity</i>	<i>Different Ethnicity</i>	<i>n</i>
Best Friends Within Sunrise Church			
Pre-Pankratz Era	75.0%	25.0%	20
Transition Era	66.7%	33.3%	36
Growth Era	34.5%	65.5%	29
Sub-Total	57.6%	42.4%	85
Best Friends Outside Sunrise Church			
Pre-Pankratz Era	76.5%	23.5%	17
Transition Era	54.2%	45.8%	24
Growth Era	54.2%	45.8%	24
Sub-Total	60.0%	40.0%	65
Totals	58.7%	41.3%	150

Top Three Best Friends Ethnicity by Church Era

<i>Best Friends by Ethnicity</i>	<i>Same Ethnicity</i>	<i>Different Ethnicity</i>	<i>n</i>
Pre-Pankratz Era (1957–1988)			
Best Friends 1	85.7%	14.3%	7
Best Friends 2	83.3%	16.7%	6
Best Friends 3	57.1%	42.9%	7
Totals	75.0%	25.0%	20
Transition Era (1989–1996)			
Best Friends 1	66.7%	33.3%	12
Best Friends 2	75.0%	25.0%	12
Best Friends 3	58.3%	41.7%	12
Totals	66.7%	33.3%	36
Growth Era (1997–2010)			
Best Friends 1	33.3%	66.7%	9
Best Friends 2	54.5%	45.5%	11
Best Friends 3	11.1%	88.9%	9
Totals	34.5%	65.5%	29

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than African-Americans, and Hispanics had the most cross-racial friends (Table 4 Caucasian Best Friends Ethnicity, Table 5 African-American Best Friends Ethnicity, and Table 6 Hispanic Best Friends Ethnicity). Research shows that “people’s personal networks are homogeneous.”²⁰ Homophily in race and ethnicity is said to create the strongest divides in personal environments.²¹ However in our sample, age and the acceptability of integration in the western region of the United States showed fewer cross-racial friendships among the Pre-Pankratz Era, with significant increases in cross-racial friendships with each subsequent generation (see Table 2 Best Friends Ethnicity by Church Era). Another interesting observation is that participants viewed sex and age as more common characteristics of friends than the same ethnicity (see Table 7 Common Characteristics of Best Friends).

As Hispanics and African-Americans gained critical mass at Sunrise Church and began inviting family and friends, those newcomers were more likely to have more of their friends in the church, as opposed to having more of their friends outside the church. These findings are not surprising since the way people develop their social network patterns is likely to predict future social network patterns. Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson wrote,

²⁰ McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook, 415.

²¹ Ibid.

Caucasian Best Friends Ethnicity

<i>Friends Comparison</i>				
<i>by Ethnicity</i>	<i>Same</i>	<i>Different</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Couples or Missing</i>
Sunrise Friends				
Best Friends 1	80.0%	20.0%	10	0
Best Friends 2	80.0%	20.0%	10	0
Best Friends 3	40.0%	60.0%	10	0
Sunrise Sub-totals	66.7%	33.3%	30	0
Non-Sunrise Friends				
Best Friends 1	70.0%	30.0%	10	0
Best Friends 2	87.5%	12.5%	8	2
Best Friends 3	42.9%	57.1%	7	3
Non-Sunrise Sub-totals	68.0%	32.0%	25	5
Totals	67.3%	32.7%	55	5

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Table 5

African-American Best Friends Ethnicity

<i>Friends Comparison</i>				
<i>by Ethnicity</i>	<i>Same</i>	<i>Different</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Couples or Missing</i>
Sunrise Friends				
Best Friends 1	75.0%	25.0%	12	0
Best Friends 2	66.7%	33.3%	12	0
Best Friends 3	50.0%	50.0%	12	0
Sunrise Sub-totals	63.9%	36.1%	36	0
Non-Sunrise Friends				
Best Friends 1	50.0%	50.0%	12	0
Best Friends 2	54.5%	45.5%	11	1
Best Friends 3	77.8%	22.2%	9	3
Non-Sunrise Sub-totals	59.4%	40.6%	32	4
Totals	61.2%	38.8%	68	4

If an organization achieves a sufficient number of minorities (where “sufficient” is best understood as an interaction between the relative and absolute size of groups) it can stabilize. It can reach a point where multiple groups become core members and recruit new members through their networks, and where visitors from various groups feel welcomed.²²

²² Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson, 154.

Hispanic Best Friends Ethnicity

Friends Comparison

<i>by Ethnicity</i>	<i>Same</i>	<i>Different</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Couples or Missing</i>
Sunrise Friends				
Best Friends 1	57.1%	42.9%	7	0
Best Friends 2	71.4%	28.6%	7	0
Best Friends 3	71.4%	28.6%	7	0
Sunrise Sub-totals	66.7%	33.3%	21	0
Non-Sunrise Friends				
Best Friends 1	50.0%	50.0%	4	3
Best Friends 2	33.3%	66.7%	3	4
Best Friends 3	33.3%	66.7%	3	4
Non-Sunrise Sub-totals	40.0%	60.0%	10	11
Totals	58.1%	41.9%	31	11

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Table 7

Common Characteristics of Best Friends

<i>Category</i>	<i>Sunrise Church Friends</i>				<i>Non-Sunrise Church Friends</i>			
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Missing</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Missing</i>
Sex	1.97	1.38	31	2	1.89	1.55	28	5
Age	3.00	1.30	32	1	2.93	1.41	29	4
Ethnicity	3.13	1.68	32	1	3.29	1.61	28	5
Education ^a	4.17	1.17	29	4	3.85	1.19	26	7
Occupation ^a	4.21	1.47	29	4	3.73	1.51	26	7
Other ^b	1.50	0.92	18	15	1.86	1.17	14	19

Note. ^a The characteristics are listed in the order of commonality greatest to least except for education and occupation which are fifth and sixth among Sunrise Church friends but sixth and fifth among non-Sunrise Church friends.

^b Although half the participants selected “other” as first, it is listed last because it includes a variety of common characteristics.

hypothesis #2: members who have been at Sunrise longer will have more cross-racial friends than those who have attended over a shorter time period.

This hypothesis was not supported by the research. The natural assumption would be that individuals from the Pre-Pankratz Era, who had an opportunity to grow with the church and meet new members over the years, would have more multiethnic friends than those from either the Transition Era or the Growth Era. Another assumption would be that those from the Transition Era would have more friends than those from the Growth Era, but this was not the case (see Table 2 Best Friends Ethnicity by Church Era).

during the Pre-Pankratz Era selected most of their top three Sunrise Church friends and top three non-Sunrise Church friends from their same ethnicity (75.0% and 76.5% respectively). They were extremely consistent. It may reflect their best friends were selected many years ago when community and church were more segregated.

Those who came to Sunrise Church during the Transition Era selected 66.7% of their top three church friends from the same ethnicity, but only 54.2% of their non-Sunrise Church friends were from the same ethnicity. Their friendships are slightly more integrated outside of church. These interviewees came to Sunrise Church between fourteen and twenty-one years ago. The society was slightly more integrated while the church remained more segregated then also.

For those who came to Sunrise during the Growth Era, the situation is reversed. They selected 34.5 % of their church friends from the same ethnicity, but 54.2% of their non-Sunrise Church friends were from the same ethnicity. Those who have come recently probably live in a more integrated society and have a greater diversity of friendships. They have certainly come to a more integrated church.

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It is difficult to discern causes from simply looking at the data. It would be interesting to solicit explanations from the interviewees. In consideration of the small size of the sample, it would also be helpful to survey or interview a large random sample of Sunrise Church attendees to discern the true pattern (and perhaps causes) of friendship selection among ethnicities.

Respondents from the Pre-Pankratz Era had a mean of about thirty-one years attending Sunrise Church. Only one of the seven respondents did not list a member of his ethnicity as his number one friend. Everyone else listed his best friend as a member of his ethnicity. Interestingly, of the second and third ranked friends, four were of the same ethnicity and three of another ethnicity. Overall 75.0% of church friends were of the same ethnicity.

Respondents from the Transition Era had a mean of 17.9 years attending Sunrise Church. Nine of the twelve listed a member of their ethnicity as their number one friend. The remaining three, one African-American and two Hispanics, listed members of other ethnicities as their best friends. As to the second ranked friends, nine were of the same ethnicity, and three were of other ethnicities. The third ranked friends showed seven of the same ethnicity and five of another ethnicity.

Respondents from the Growth Era had a mean of about 6.0 years attending Sunrise Church. Three of nine listed members of their ethnicity as their number

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one friend. The remaining six listed members of other ethnicities as their best friends. An interesting side note about these six respondents is that two are from interracial marriages, two grew up in an ethnically diverse community with multiethnic friends, one grew up exposed to different ethnic groups and teaches in a multiethnic school, and one is multiracial.

From our sample this data shows that individuals who have greater exposure, interaction, and friendships with multiethnic groups outside of the church will develop cross-racial friendships in the church. It would be interesting to see if this observation holds true in other regions of the country with a community as similarly diverse as Southern California. As to their second ranked friends, six are of the same ethnicity, and five are of another ethnicity. Of the third ranked friends, two are of the same ethnicity, and nine are of another.

hypothesis #3: churches that offer multiple opportunities for social interaction will facilitate the development of cross-racial friendships.

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By our definition of friendship—individuals with whom you share your intimate feelings—the research did not support this hypothesis. However, if we consider the degrees of friendship,²³ such as “best friend” (which falls under our definition of “better friend”) and “good friend” (which is more of an acquaintance), then there is evidence that programming did create an environment for the Proximity Effect,²⁴ the regular and ongoing exposure of individuals from different ethnicities to one another; Similarity,²⁵ allowing racially and ethnically diverse individuals to bond based upon similar backgrounds; and Reciprocity,²⁶ for individuals to experience their acceptance by those different from them. This thereby opens them up to build relationships with those not like them. The following are some examples from the interview participants:

It’s just getting to meet people and establish relationships with them and being able to participate in a small group with them and get to know the families and being able to pray with them and being able to open your eyes and see they are good people and they love the Lord. They love other people.²⁷

I think just realizing that finding people that love God and love God’s Word as much as I did kind of erased everything [prejudices]. It turned from,

²³ McAndrew and Rybak, 147–163.

²⁴ Quillian and Campbell, 540–566.

²⁵ T. M. Newcomb, “Stabilities Underlying Changes in Interpersonal Attraction,” *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 66 no. 4 (1963): 376–386.

²⁶ Curtis and Miller, 284–290.

²⁷ Interview, Hispanic male from the Growth Era.

things that I like and your values are the same as mine.”²⁸

If people worked together in groups or projects or going to home studies and meet people in their own homes and seeing the other side of people, that helps a lot on getting to know people. And once you get to know them, those biases kind of disappear, you know, for me.²⁹

hypothesis #4: multiethnic interaction will help individuals deal with their biases and prejudices.

This hypothesis was supported by the research. Members who expressed having racial prejudice before coming to Sunrise overcame those prejudices and developed friendships with different races as their second and third level friends in the church. These changes in attitude were not the result of individuals attending racial reconciliation classes, because Sunrise does not offer them, but of Dr. Jay Pankratz’s repeated teaching on love (Luke 6:27, 10:27; John 13:34–35) forgiveness (Luke 11:4), and humility (Philippians 2:1–3).

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Some examples of this process from the interview participants include:

Well, you know, I didn’t like black people, didn’t know them well, didn’t have relationships with black people before. And then probably with Mexican people too, and again, this is going from country to country, we Salvadorans don’t like Mexicans, Mexicans don’t like Salvadorans and things like that . . . but here at Sunrise, most of the people I work with are Mexicans, so that changed.³⁰

As I have gotten to meet new people of other races, I’ve learned to love those people as brothers and sisters, and I don’t look at them as another race.³¹

Several answers were given to the question, “What are the influencing factors at Sunrise that have helped you work through your negative racial attitudes?” Some of those answers are as follows:

It helped me to be open-minded. It helped me to understand. It helped me to make friends and not keep out the enemy.³²

Well, I think if anything, I hadn’t had a whole lot of interaction with other ethnicities prior to coming to Sunrise. So a lack of knowledge, ignorance, and as for biases—I probably had stereo-typical biases.³³

²⁸ Interview, Hispanic female from the Growth Era.

²⁹ Interview, African-American male from the Transition Era.

³⁰ Interview, Hispanic male from the Growth Era.

³¹ Interview, Caucasian male from the Pre-Pankratz Era.

³² Interview, African-American male from the Pre-Pankratz Era.

³³ Interview, Caucasian male from the Pre-Pankratz Era.

I had hatred that I felt for the people that were dealing with us the wrong way, and I brought all of that here to Sunrise Church, and the interesting thing is that I didn't realize that until I had come here to Sunrise Church. [This interviewee also responded to a question on how he dealt with prejudice.] Getting to know people from the other race. One of the greatest factors was I had a gentleman, a white guy from this church, come here. He had started in a small group that I was leading, and the week he was there, he called me and asked could he have lunch with me? My thought [was], "I don't want to be sitting around. What are we going to talk about?" But it was such enlightenment once I met him. He talked to me about his prejudices, and in him talking to me about his prejudices, I realized that I had the same the prejudices that he had. But he was addressing them, and I had not addressed them at the time.³⁴

Those that admitted having prejudice prior to Sunrise were able to overcome their prejudices through interaction with other Sunrise Church members. Therefore, programming at a multiracial church may be a big factor in how effective the church is at providing opportunities for ethnicities to interact and deal with their racial bias and prejudice.

The vast majority of respondents, however, stated that they did not have any prejudice prior to joining Sunrise. Many were already comfortable with multiracial environments.

Some examples of such sentiments include:

This is how it was in the Bay area where I grew up. So it was a lot of multicultural where I grew up, so moving into a church like this is—I can't even see it—I've never been to an all-white or all-segregated kind of church, so I wouldn't know any other kind of church.³⁵

Basically not being born in America (Belize), it is nothing to me because we mix up with everybody who comes to church. For me, personally, it's not the color of the skin or ethnicity, it's if you come to worship God, and I think that's the important thing. So seeing all the different ethnicities here is like being right back home.³⁶

I love it. I think it's great. My best friends are African-American and Hispanic. I teach at ethnically diverse schools.³⁷

³⁴ Interview, African-American male from the Pre-Pankratz Era.

³⁵ Interview, Caucasian male from the Growth Era.

³⁶ Interview, Hispanic female from the Transition Era.

³⁷ Interview, Caucasian female from the Growth Era.

Well, as I said . . . this wasn't new to me because my husband was in the military, so after twenty years, it wasn't anything new to me.³⁸

Individuals who are attracted to multiethnic churches are comfortable with multiracial environments. These people are examples of what Emerson and Woo call the Sixth American.

Sixth Americans live in a world of primary relationships and associations that are racially diverse. Like other Americans, the Sixth American may work in a racially diverse setting, see racially different others at the grocery store, and perhaps have a friend of a different race. But unlike other Americans, the Sixth American's "world of diversity" does not stop here. It is not a racially homogenous world with some diversity sprinkled in; the Sixth American's world is a racially diverse world with some homogeneity sprinkled in. It is a world, we can imagine, where one's friends, acquaintances, fellow parishioners, and perhaps even spouse, parent, or child are from multiple racial groups.³⁹

As a Sixth American myself (Art Lucero) and an acquaintance of many who could be labeled as Sixth Americans at Sunrise Church, our research does not support the speculation that Sixth Americans, or anyone else for that matter, were attracted to Sunrise Church because of its ethnic diversity. Some examples include:

Well, I really wasn't attracted to Sunrise. What brought us here was that we were invited by a friend. And we had been searching for some other churches and were unable to find one. I was looking for a Black church. And I came here because my wife wanted to come. And that's what brought me here. When I got here, I think I was surprised because what I found here was a lot different from what I had expected.⁴⁰

Actually, it was the message. Pastor Jay was speaking on contentment, and I was really attracted to the message, and it was something that I remembered over and over. I came to Sunrise actually with my mom. . . . I thought it was a nice church, nice building. The people were really smiling and friendly. That's pretty much about it. I sing and I really like music, so a lot of my observations dealt with the worship in the beginning of the service.⁴¹

My sister used to attend here, and I was looking for a church home, so I decided to check it out and the confirmation was Pastor Jay preaching that he said, "Don't take my word for it, read it in the Bible, and double check." When I was searching for a church home, I knew that was something that I was

³⁸ Interview, African-American female from the Pre-Pankratz Era.

³⁹ Michael O. Emerson and Rodney M. Woo, *People of the Dream: Multiracial Congregations in the United States*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press) 2006: 99.

⁴⁰ Interview, African-American male from the Transition Era.

⁴¹ Interview, African-American female from the Growth Era.

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looking for, someone that wasn't gonna just tell me what they thought but
encourage me to examine Scriptures for myself.⁴²

I was looking for a church where my kids can grow. My kids [were] not
attending church joyful[ly], you know, they didn't really look for[ward] to
go[ing] to church. There was no teaching for kids over twelve or whatever. And
that's what attract[ed] me to Sunrise.⁴³

I used to go to Catholic mass, and there wasn't anywhere for the kids, and
my kids did not want to sit there and be bored for an hour. . . . I was looking
for God. I didn't think there would be such a difference between Christian
church and Catholic church, but I did find there was a difference. . . . When I
came to Sunrise, I thought this isn't like a church; this is like a concert place,
like an auditorium. This is not what a church is supposed to look like. But I
love the teaching . . . which is what kept me coming back.⁴⁴

192 One interesting side note as to how individuals in the church conceptualize
racial issues was the fact that several of them talked about how the racial makeup
of the church was indicative of what it will be like in heaven. Some examples of
this include:

I think that if we are going to look at heaven, this is what heaven is going
to look like. Every ethnic group is there that is on this earth will be there. And
Sunrise Church reflects that.⁴⁵

I love the ethnicities of our church. That's the way it's going to be in
heaven, and I love it.⁴⁶

As the church is unique, the aspect that we have all kinds, we have the
reality of how things are going to be in heaven. We're going to be different, all
nations, all ethnicities, so I like that. We're in training already here to get along
with people and love each other.⁴⁷

So, as I said, it doesn't matter the color of your skin, as long as you accept
Christ. I think everybody should be able to fellowship together because when
we get to heaven we'll see everybody fellowshiping, and not only one color
but different colors.⁴⁸

This was a common pattern, and it was most pronounced among African-
Americans. However, it should be noted that observations about the church being
like heaven are not limited to African-Americans, and such symbolism may be a

⁴² Interview, Filipino male from the Growth Era.

⁴³ Interview, Hispanic male from the Transition Era.

⁴⁴ Interview, Hispanic female from the Growth Era.

⁴⁵ Interview, African-American male from the Transition Era.

⁴⁶ Interview, Hispanic male from the Pre-Pankratz Era.

⁴⁷ Interview, Hispanic male from the Growth Era.

⁴⁸ Interview, African-American female from the Transition Era.

conclusions

Friendship patterns play an important role in shaping the racial attitudes of attendees at a multiracial church. The attitudes of those raised in segregated regions of the country would tend to be biased against individuals of different ethnicities and have a preference for developing friendships among their own kind. Those raised in more integrated regions of the country would demonstrate a greater acceptance of ethnicities and be more open to developing friendships among them. Regardless of the context in which one is raised, biblical instruction to love, honor, respect, and forgive will greatly impact the need for individual racial reconciliation and the development of subsequent cross-racial friends, be they good, better, or best.

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Friendship theories allow for the development of cross racial relationships. “Good friends” (acquaintances) are people we encounter on a regular basis. We may even serve with them in ministry, but we can’t always recall their names. “Better friends” are people we know by name and participate in church programming on a regular basis, but they are not the ones to whom we open up our hearts. The Homophily principle still prevails, and people are more likely to develop core friendships or “best friends” with people of the same race.

The encouraging sign of this study is that the more socially acceptable integration becomes in our society, the greater the potential for individuals to develop cross-racial “best friends” in the church as well as outside of it.

As I (Art Lucero) have observed and interacted with the Sunrise congregation over the last ten years, I have seen many overcome their racist views (Caucasian, African American, and Hispanic). Most mix it up in small group Bible studies, men’s and women’s classes, sports, and ministry service. I see positive interaction among them. However, close friendships are still among those of their own kind or common interest (work, school, age). We just can’t seem to overcome the Homophily Principle. Then again, must we? The greater issue is that we live by the Apostle Paul’s admonition to the Colossians.

Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the

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 Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all
 together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as
 members of one body you were called to peace.⁴⁹

It's our Christ-like attitude toward others, not necessarily the number of "best
 friends" we have, that truly matters.

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⁴⁹ Colossians 3:11–15a, NIV.

Lucero and Weaver: Building Healthy Relationships in A Multi-ethnic Congregation Wit

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